

THERAPEUTIC WRITING

To Peacefully Navigate Life's Changes



WITH YOUR MUSE,
PATRICIA BRAWLEY, PH.D., LPC

What Do You Mean I'm Too Old to Drink?

Alcohol helps many people relax or cope with changes in their lives. It's not that easy to down-size, retire, deal with adult children and, possibly, aging parents at the same time. This is the plight of people over 55 years-old.

You're not alone. You have family and friends going through the same thing. Let's have another round. Put a few more ice cubes in my drink. What's wrong with that?

The doctor said a couple of glasses of wine was good for my health.



I'll share a story with you. I was recently in a counseling session with an older couple whose marriage was in trouble. The wife was upset that her husband had stopped doing nearly everything. He was almost completely inactive and had become an entirely different person mentally and physically. Once I had the chance to talk to them, we figured out he was taking 3 or 4 powerful prescription meds that minimize one's energy and drinking alcohol almost daily. Now who would feel like doing anything under those circumstances?

The couple didn't realize how many depressive meds the husband was taking because he received them slowly over time and the dosages increased. They didn't think of the drugs as downers because they were from a doctor and used to help with serious conditions. To add to that, he would take over-the-counter meds like Aspirin and give no thought to the effect it would have on his body.

Maybe this hasn't happened to you but, for many, the glass of wine turns into a life-altering disease. Ask any director of a treatment center and you will hear those stories. How does this happen?

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The fact is we get older and body functions (like metabolism) slow down. Two drinks feel and look like four. Because the liver and kidneys do not function as well as they once did and because 83% of people over age 65 are taking prescription drugs (for pain, anxiety, insomnia), your body has to process more than just the two drinks. And, the prescription drugs enhance the effects of alcohol. In negative ways.

We drink alcohol and take medications for the same reason -- to feel better. Many people also have a history of using illicit drugs. The number of older adults using illicit drugs is expected to double by 2020 to 3.5 million people!

So, you can see why many people are shocked to learn what they've always done is now something they need to quit. Just at a time when all the stresses of aging and change are happening, and both physical and mental pains are emerging. And you may think, "But, it's always worked before."

NIH Comment and Harmful Interactions

A National Institute of Health (NIH) reports says older people can develop problems with alcohol even though their drinking habits have not changed. Again, this is mostly because, as we age, we get sicker and take more medicines.

Here are a few that are harmful when taken with alcohol:

- Taking aspirin or arthritis medications and drinking alcohol can increase the risk of bleeding in the stomach.
- Taking the painkiller acetaminophen and drinking alcohol can increase the chances of liver damage.
- Cold and allergy medicines that contain antihistamines often make people sleepy. Drinking alcohol can make this drowsiness worse and impair coordination.
- Drinking alcohol and taking some medicines that aid sleep, reduce pain, or relieve anxiety or depression can cause a range of problems, including sleepiness and poor coordination as well as difficulty breathing, rapid heartbeat and memory problems.
- Drinking alcohol and taking medications for high blood pressure, diabetes, ulcers, gout, and heart failure can make those conditions worse.

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Since medications stay in the body for at least several hours, and time-released ones stay even longer, there can be a problem if you drink alcohol after taking medicine.

Read the labels. Some say "do not drink alcohol" or "do not operate machinery when taking this medicine." That's code for do not drink with this medication.

Don't rely on this article to answer your questions. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist about whether or not it's okay to drink alcohol while taking your medicine.

Save your health. Save your money. By 2018, health care costs associated with alcohol and drug problems among older adults is predicted to go to \$100 billion dollars. With a B. Depressing statistics?

Even more. About 10% of older adults admitted to hospitals and 20% of those admitted to psychiatric services have symptoms of alcoholism. In nursing homes, problem drinking runs as high as 49%.

THE GOOD NEWS

You do not have to be statistic.

- Recognition of a problem is the first step. The person who realizes something is wrong must get help. That can start with a family physician, drug or alcohol support group.
- Recognition that a family member is having a problem should never start with accusing or suggesting that the person is abusing. Instead, urge your loved one to go to the doctor for a concern such as potential heart or any other physical problem that might be worrisome.
- If the problem exists in someone 80 or older, they, and or the family should seek help groups that comprise of people who are in their age group. Older elderly can relate more readily to people their own age.
- There are numerous on line tools a family member can use to determine if there is a problem.

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Adults can make up their minds and stop drinking and taking illicit drugs with guidance and support. No matter what the age, there is hope (and health!)

If you would like a confidential assessment to determine your risks, please call Dr. Patricia Brawley at 601-684-965 or you can click on this link to schedule an appointment. <http://patriciabrawleyphdlpc.fullslate.com/services/18>